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Equipping the Saints

A method of self-directed Bible study for lay groups

Verna J. Dozier

Resources for people who care about congregations.

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PREFACE

Verna Dozier, author of Equipping the Saints, is a born teacher. Since her retirement from the District of Columbia Public School system, she has concentrated on teaching people how to study the Bible. "The point of lay Bible study," says Verna, "is to help lay people reclaim their authority as the people of God." Even if they consciously reject an authoritarian approach, laity are raised in a culture of dependence on authorities. We're taught to sit at the feet of experts, and not to trust the validity of our own wrestling.

Equipping the Saints is intended to be a resource for those who want an alternative to dependence on "experts," those who wish they had a way of getting down to Biblical fundamentals without being fundamentalists.

As she has traveled around the country teaching laity to use the Bible as a resource for their life and ministry, Verna Dozier has developed an easily understood method lay groups can use for Bible study. Using various translations and commentaries as resources, groups move through three types of questions: (1)What does the passage say? What are the meanings of the words used? (2)What is the significance of the passage? What did it say to the people who preserved it? (3)What does the passage say to me/us now?

As a way of testing this self-directed method, we asked a pilot group at St. Columba's Church in Washington to try it on their own. We approached the pastor first, and he was enthusiastic. Seven lay volunteers met with Verna for an introductory session and committed themselves to six weeks of independent study, wrestling with the gospels for Lent from the lectionary used by many Christian traditions.

This small book includes, along with the introduction and instructions by Verna Dozier, excerpts from the record of the St. Columba's group as they studied the Bible. The reader can look over their shoulders, and participate in their questions, struggles, and discoveries with the gospel lessons. Equipping the Saints would be a helpful companion, not only for the lay groups for whom it was written, but also for individual Bible study, for an aid in sermon planning, or for any pastor who wonders whether lay people can study the Bible.

Celia Allison Hahn
Director of Publications
The Alban Institute

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INTRODUCTION

An effective ministry of the laity, I believe, is predicated on lay people knowing who they are -- the redeemed community the New Israel, the continuing agents of God's good will for all creation.

Lay people are reminded of the Good News of their calling every Sunday in the liturgies of Word and Sacrament when they gather as a people; but unless they already know the Story, they are likely to -- and do -- miss the reminder.

That Story is what the Bible is all about. Lay people need to study the Bible to find out who they are. Studying the Bible is no easy task. It is the most important thing a Christian can do, but it is no easy task.

It is a rigorous discipline, energizing heart and soul and mind and strength. The purpose of this little book is to help you study the Bible, to assist you in locating the helps you need, but also to encourage you to cut loose from inappropriate dependence on "those who know." It is intended to be a practical guide for studying the lessons used in your church on Sunday. To encourage you in this venture, we want to offer you some companions -- you can look over their shoulders on the first leg of the journey.

A group of seven people from St. Columba's Church in Washington, DC, undertook a study of the Gospels for Lent, 1981, taken from the lectionary used by many Christian traditions. This is the record of their wrestlings, their high points and their low points. It is offered to show how profoundly lay people can study the Bible and to encourage you to go and do likewise.

EXPLAINING THE PROCESS

The Bible, I believe, is the most important collection of books in the world -- and the least understood. Because the message of the Bible is not immediately available and because we have been erroneously led to believe that it <u>is</u>, lay people often end their efforts to read the Bible feeling discouraged, guilty, and frustrated that they missed something the more spiritually mature comprehend.

Reading the Bible and studying the Bible are two different activities. Reading the Bible is a liturgical, devotional, community building process; but the only way to plumb the Biblical witness is to <u>study</u> the Bible.

Studying the Bible is hard work. It takes the commitment of a lifetime. No work, however, is more important for the laos, the People of God. The Bible recalls our past, undergirds our present, and shapes our future.

We need to be about the study of it. Though it takes a lifetime, we are convinced you can start where you are and go at a pace that fits you. But begin.

People often ask the question, "Where shall I begin to study the Bible?" I really think you can begin anywhere. I would suggest that you begin with the New Testament rather than the Old Testament because the scholarly problems are more difficult for the Old. Studying the New Testament will direct you to the Old Testament because the Biblical story is of a piece. The Gospel of Mark, possibly the oldest formulation of the Good News and the shortest, is one good place to start.

A natural starting place, however, it seems to me, is the part of Scripture that will be used in the Sunday worship in your church. The St. Columba's group used the Gospels for Lent from the new three-year lectionary.

The study should begin with an overview of the Bible. Very briefly, the Bible is the record of God the Creator calling into being a people whose life together would be a witness to the world of the redeeming power of the love of God. The first Israel was chosen, not because of any greatness they had to offer but because God loved them. They were to remember their story and tell it to their children and talk about it day in and day out. Like the first Israel, the New Israel, the Christian Church, "once were no people but now are God's people -- a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." The first Israel remembered an exodus from slavery and deliverance at the Red Sea. The New Israel celebrates being called out of darkness into the marvelous light, deliverance by the mighty act of God in Christ. The rise and fall of the Hebrew kingdoms, the struggles of the Remnant, the concerns of the prophets, the collapse of the nation, the advent of Jesus of Nazareth, the response of the early Christian communities -- all these are acts in the drama of redemption that is the Bible. No part of the Story stands by itself. Every verse, every chapter, every book must be studied against the backdrop of the total story.

Not only must the total story of the Bible be kept in mind, but the various literary forms in which the story is told must be given attention. The Bible contains history, drama, poetry, short stories, essays, letters, and a form of literature not found anywhere else in the world -- the Gospels. Each form should be approached with respectful attention to its literary integrity. You would not read the editorial page of the daily paper as you would read a book of poems -- even if the subject matter were the same. You ask different questions of different forms. You go to them expecting different reflections of reality. So with the Scriptures. In many tongues, in many forms, from many cultures do we hear the wonderful words of God.

Three Steps

In studying the Bible, use more than one translation and have one or two commentaries handy. The Bible should be studied in significant segments -- never verse by verse. (The verses to which we attach so much significance are really later divisions of the record.) There are three important steps to be taken in studying the Bible:

Step 1. Clarify what the passage is saying. What do the words in the passage mean? When different translations use different words, try to ascertain the reasons for the changes. Check out the commentaries for any obscurities in the manuscripts, any variations. Research carefully any nuances the words might have that cannot be picked up in English.

Step 2. Clarify why this passage was preserved. Remember the Bible is the record of the response of the community of faith to the action of God in history. What was the significance of this passage for the community that considered it important enough to pass on? What did it say to them? What were the issues they were dealing with at the time? How did this passage speak to the issues? Use commentaries to explore the answers to these questions.

Step 3. Reflect on what the passage means for you/the Church today. The change from the word "clarify" to the word "reflect" for this step indicates an important change in the process. Step 3 should not be done before steps 1 and 2 are done as thoroughly as possible. Information for steps 1 and 2 is available in commentaries and reference books. Once you are clear about the meaning of the passage and the significance of the passage, you are ready for your own reflection. This is the work you have to do for yourself. No one can do your reflection for you. Your answers to the question "What does it mean to me?" are your answers. They can be -- should be -- shared in the community, but they are not to be judged right or wrong by the community. You tell it as you see it. You hear it as someone else sees it. The interaction of the various responses will deepen and enrich the life of the people of God. And we will all live together with our imperfect visions until the Perfect comes.

THE PROCESS IN ACTION

This is the study sheet the St. Columba's group was given. The type 1, type 2, and type 3 questions grow out of the steps 1, 2, and 3 just explained.

STUDY PROCESS

Before the meeting:
a. Read the Gospel passage in more than one translation.
b. List the questions you have about the passage.
c. Identify questions as type 1, 2, or 3, as you see them.
d. Use one or more commentaries to find answers to your 1 and 2 type questions. If you find you have no 1 or 2 type questions, read a commentary to refresh your knowledge.
e. Then (and only then) reflect on your type 3 questions.

At the meeting of the group (2 hours):
a. Fifteen minutes at the beginning for getting on board, ventilation, etc.
b. Allow a half hour for responses to these type one questions:
What did I learn about what the passage says?
What did I still want to know about what the passage says?
c. Allow a half hour for responses to these type two questions:
What did I learn about the significance of this passage?
What do I still want to know about its significance?
d. Allow a half hour for sharing type 3 insights.
e. Allow fifteen minutes at the end for evaluation, discussion of needed changes, etc.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

Type 1: What does the passage say? What are the meanings of the words used?

Type 2: What is the significance of the passage? What did it say to the people who preserved it?

Type 3: What does the passage say to me/us now?

The members of the group spent from one to ten hours a week in individual preparation, with most spending about two hours. The Bibles they used were:
The New English Bible
The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version
The Oxford Annotated Bible: Revised Standard Version

Good News Bible
The Holy Bible: King James Version
The New International Bible
The Jerusalem Bible
The Bible in Modern English, J.B. Phillips
The Living Bible
A New Translation of the Bible, James Moffatt, Harper & Bros., New York and London, 1922.

The Bible was originally written in languages that we do not speak. It was written on perishable materials so that it had to be copied again and again in order to be preserved. The translator faces two major problems: (1) to render in another language the import of the original language -- not only to find word for word equivalents but also nuance for nuance; and (2) to find the manuscript most accurate, the nearest to the original.

The constant stream of translations is the result of efforts to deal with those two problems. Newer translations, because of the continuing work of archeologists, have access to older manuscripts than older translations; and translations aim at making the classic languages available to a variety of readers. The New English Bible makes the Bible more understandable for readers in Great Britain; the Good News Bible makes the Bible more understandable for the United States. There are some translations that do not aim at a literal word-for-word translation as the Revised Standard Version does; they attempt to give the flavor and significance. J. B. Phillips, in my opinion, has done this most successfully. He has also written a book about his work that illuminates the task of the translator: Ring of Truth (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1967).

The St. Columba's group found the following commentaries helpful to them:

The Interpreter's Bible, XII Vol., George Arthur Buttrick, gen. ed., Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1956.

Barclay's New Testament Commentaries, 2nd. ed., William Barclay, Trans. with Intro. and Inter., Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1956.

The Anchor Bible, William Foxwell Albright, David Noel Freedman, gen. eds., Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co. Inc. 1971.

The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, J.J.S. Perowne, gen. ed., London: Cambridge University Press, 1895-1919.

The One Volume Bible Commentary, J.R. Dummelow, ed., New York: The Macmillan Co., 1909.

The Pelican Gospel Commentaries, D.E. Nineham, ed., Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963.

The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible, Charles E. Layman, ed., Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1971.

Concise Bible Commentary, William Kemp Lowther Clarke, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1953.

The Abingdon Bible Commentary, Frederick Carl Eiselen, Edwin Lewis, and David Downey, eds., New York: The Abingdon Press, 1929.

The Pelican Commentaries on the New Testament are excellent. They also carry a translation of the Biblical passages. Various books of the Bible have single commentaries by scholars who have made a specialty of studying that particular book. Many of these are in a language and style easily understood by the layperson just beginning the study of the Bible. Your pastor may have suggestions of other commentaries he or she would recommend.

The group at St. Columba's offers the following suggestions for Bible study groups:

- Agree on a regular time for meetings.
- Keep meeting times close together (weekly).
- Adhere to the allotted time frames. They are not easy to follow, and a convener or timekeeper is necessary.
- Have available and use a short history of the Bible as a whole. The St. Columba's group used my tape, The Story of the Bible, which has such an overview on one side and a summary of this method of Bible study on the other side. This cassette tape is available at $6 from book stores or from The Episcopal Radio and TV Foundation, 3379 Peachtree Rd. NE, Atlanta, GA 30326. A good short history to read is The Bible for Today's Church by Bennett and Edwards (Seabury, 1979), especially chapters 5, 6, and 7. A longer work, which might serve as a Bible study course, is The Kingdom of God, by John Bright (Abingdon, 1953).
- At the introductory session, have a general overview to put readings in perspective.
- Members of the group should read different references.
- Keep an open mind. Regardless of your familiarity with the passage, there is still a great deal to be learned.

- Always begin private Bible study as well as group meetings with prayer.
- Listen carefully to what other members of the group are saying.
- Give high priority to this commitment.
- Look for ways the things you learn apply to your life now.

SOME CAUTIONS

At each session someone has to assume responsibility for seeing that the session keeps within the time frame. This leadership function can rotate. It is important at each session to cover as many as possible of each type of question, so the session must move along.

The session should keep within the two-hour time frame.

Be sure each person gets a chance to respond to each type of question.

Do not waste any time haggling over whether a question is a 1, 2, or 3 type. We are on individual journeys. Each person's journey is nourished and watered by each other's journey. but ultimately it is your own journey. There does not have to be consensus on what is a 2 question or what is a 1 question. If it is a 2 question for me, I'll go after it as a 2 question. I may get help from what you found in the same area -- and I may not. Bible study groups are not places where we give each other answers. Bible study groups are places where we learn as much as we can about what the passage says, what it has said to the community of faith, so we will know more accurately what it says to our own type 3 questions. Sometimes, if we've done our work on the type 1 and 2 questions, we'll find that a particular passage doesn't speak to our type 3 question at all. We will learn in our study that we've asked a question of a passage that the passage doesn't address.

Do not be deterred by the feeling that someone else can do this better that you are doing it. That is a very natural feeling. We have been reared in a culture of authorities that gives us the idea someone else knows more about this than we do, and we should just be sitting at his/her feet and learning. We have been socialized not to respect our own wrestlings. That is the point of lay Bible study -- to help lay people reclaim their authority as the people of God. Nobody, but nobody, can do your group's Bible study better than the people in your group!

THE ST. COLUMBA'S GROUP AT WORK

We asked the members of the group to introduce themselves to you. This is what they said:

CYNTHIA: I am 46 years old, and have been married to Roland for 18 years. We have enjoyed raising our two daughters, who are now both teenagers. The whole family is very involved with life (and more recently death) at St. Columba's. As a museum curator and musician, I have heavy commitments outside the home and church.
KATHY: I am Kathy, 39 years old, single, and an international economist. I have been attending church regularly for about five years, after a 15-year period of not attending any church very often. I spent the first 18 years in regular (very regular) attendance.
MICHAEL: I'm 43 and I work as a patent examiner for the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. I'm married and have been a parishioner at St. Columba's Church for four years.
ANONA: I am in my forties. For the past year and a half, I have been one of the two parish secretaries at St. Columba's Episcopal Church. I am married to Wayne, one of the members of this group, and we have two sons. Our middle child, a daughter, died five years ago at age 8½, after a seven-year battle with leukemia.
SUZANNE: My name is Suzanne. I am 39 years of age. I am a housewife and mother of two children, and volunteer in the community.
ROLAND: I am Roland, a 51-year-old husband, and father of two girls (13 and 15). My wife Cynthia is a member of this group. By vocation I am a publisher of scholarly books in the social sciences, by avocation I am a typographic designer and printer; by birth and lifelong association I am an Episcopalian. My knowledge of church history and dogma and my acquaintance with the Bible are sketchy and unsystematic -- but I love what I know and seek to learn more.
WAYNE: I am 43 years of age, have two sons (age 16 and 9½) and have shared the work of this pilot group with my wife, Anona. My religious heritage through my family was Protestant, but I have been drawn to the Episcopal Church since high school days. My church affiliation seemed completed when in 1973 I was finally confirmed in the Episcopal Church. The church offers me the combined and shared emphasis of the Word and the Sacraments which I need. In my parish I have served on the Vestry, am one of the parish's lay readers/ chalice bearers, and serve as the Master of Ceremonies and Acolytes. My secular job is on Capitol Hill as one of the Enrolling-Digest Clerks of the House of Representatives (working with the legislative process of the House).

Following are edited selections from the transcripts of the group as they studied the Lenten gospels from the ecumenical lectionary. The group's study sessions actually took two hours each. You can tell where one excerpt ends and another begins by the rows of asterisks that divide them (*********).

FIRST WEEK

SUZANNE: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
KATHY: Our first reading is from Matthew 4, verses 1-11: "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry. And the tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.'
But he answered, 'It is written,
"Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."
Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,
"He will give his angels charge of you,"
and
"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."'
Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God."' Again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Begone, Satan! for it is written,
"You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve."'
Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him."

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KATHY: I listed a whole bunch of questions, and found they were all type one and two. I wonder if that's because it is

a very familiar story. What shall we do? Shall we talk about the questions or should somebody write them down?
WAYNE: You're talking about type one questions: Anona and I were saying that it really is not that difficult, as far as what do the words mean.
CYNTHIA: Are we not asking tough enough questions about the words? I had the same reaction, too. I began to look at a couple of these commentaries, and "the Son of God" -- well, that might be a type two.
WAYNE: "What did it mean at that time."
SUZANNE: If the question is "What does the passage say?" -- I find it very difficult. The early part of this week I struggled to determine what category these questions fall in. "Significance" is really the clue to the type two questions for me. For instance, "the Son of God." If it's a type one question, then someone's asking about the actual meaning of those words. Type two gets into what is the significance of the Son of God to the people of that time. I simply looked up the actual words, some of which I thought I knew the answers to and it turned out there was a much bigger answer.
WAYNE: I notice in my notes for that first category, last week when Verna was here she said the literal meaning.
KATHY: Yes, the type one questions that I had were questions like why forty days. I put that as a one and a two, because I had the notion that forty must be signaling something, and it also has significance in the time it was written. Sometimes I think they're just intertwined -- you'll never be able to tell a type one from a type two, but I don't think it matters.
CYNTHIA: But a literal question would be, like one of mine, "What is the spirit that led him to the wilderness?"
ROLAND: According to this commentary, it's clear. It means the Holy Spirit.
SUZANNE: Did you use the dictionary for any of these words? Webster's dictionary really helped. Are we only supposed to use Bible Commentaries?
WAYNE: I should think not.
SUZANNE: The dictionary definition of spirit is "spirit of God, breath of life, life principle, gift of deity, hence the agent of vital and conscious functions in man...."
ROLAND: There's quite a cast of characters in this thing, one of whom is that Spirit, and then the devil himself -- and then some angels towards the end of the thing. And I think all of these words have some meaning. I gather that the spirit was the Holy Spirit, the devil the tempter, and there's another word used -- Satan -- that's also a spirit.
KATHY: I had a question on that. Is the Spirit that led him the same as the Holy Spirit that came after the resurrection? Because it says the Spirit led him out and then when the devil left, the angels came back. So it seems the Spirit didn't reappear, at least....
SUZANNE: That's a good question. You know, I never even thought of it as anything but the Spirit of God.
KATHY: Well, I'm sure it is, but we're probably splitting hairs.
CYNTHIA: But that's what we're supposed to do.
MICHAEL: But on the other hand we pray to God not to lead us into temptation; then here comes this presumably Holy Spirit leading God Himself into temptation. You wonder whether that's really the same Spirit you thought it was.
SUZANNE: It was leading into the wilderness, not into temptation, though, wasn't it?
ANONA: That takes us to the meaning of the word "temptation." What does temptation mean in this particular instance? If the Bible at some point says that God does not tempt people, and this says, "was led by the Spirit to be tempted," then I think we have to look closely at what the meaning of the word "tempted" is. And I think one of the commentaries says it is more a testing....
WAYNE: Barclay states that it can no way be taken as we do in English, because the word "tempted" in English consistently has a bad meaning -- that of enticing someone to do wrong, or seeking to seduce someone into sin. That the Greek word, and he goes back to the Greek and he gives the Greek word, peirazein, has an altogether different meaning, and it means "to test."
ROLAND: A trial, a probing....

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MICHAEL: Are we ready to get to type two questions?
KATHY: I have one more question on number one, and that's about where the quotes came from. The devil quoted, Jesus quoted, it was an exchange of quotations there.
ROLAND: Old Testament....
KATHY: Yes, but there are a lot of different parts to the Old Testament, and they're all trying to prove different things; so I was interested to note that all Jesus' quotes came from Deuteronomy right around the same place, and the Devil quoted Psalms.
SUZANNE: And misquoted at that.
KATHY: And the type two part of this question has to do with why this particular set of quotations was remembered or used. And I think there is more to that, because all of this was addressed to people who were steeped in rabbinical training in the Old Testament. And so that quoting business says more than we hear....

ANONA: Why Deuteronomy and why Psalms?
ROLAND: I think this is a stylized sort of thing; they're trying to convey to a Jewish audience that this guy is one of us, he's part of the tradition, he's quoting our laws -- that is Deuteronomy -- and he is therefore someone we can listen to. This may be part of the revelation Verna was talking about.

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WAYNE: But I think He went through the same kind of testing even later on in His ministry.
KATHY: These are the kinds of temptations that will be present throughout His ministry, and come back to Him many times and come to every one of us many times. It's just a reminder of these three major ways that problems can arise in trying to deal with the world around us and our desire to further our own interests.
WAYNE: For example, Gethsemane. Asking that the cup might pass from Him.
ROLAND: One of the questions I had -- I guess it's a category two question -- it said the devil went away or whatever, the devil left Him. Did he know that he was licked? Was it three strikes and you're out? Why did he go away?
KATHY: The inning was over. (Laughter)
SUZANNE: He was licking his wounds.
MICHAEL: It says here that the tempter spoke again to Jesus at Caesarea Philippi, when Peter tried to dissuade Him from taking the way of the cross, and when He said to Peter the very same words that He said to the tempter in the wilderness -- "begone Satan," so there was another instance where through Peter He was tempted to give up His quest. So there was another temptation later on.

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KATHY: The question of why did the Spirit lead Him to be tempted -- why didn't the devil lead Him to be tempted?
CYNTHIA: That's a question I can't resolve.
KATHY: Why wasn't it the devil who led Him to be tempted rather than the Spirit -- the Holy Spirit. Well, it says it was the Spirit. And then I had another question. Is that Spirit the same as the Holy Spirit that came in a new form and gave new life to the young church?
ROLAND: Why did the Spirit push Him out into the wilderness? To be tempted. That was the purpose. That was something desirable to do.
ANONA: Both the Holy Spirit and the devil would each have His attention in the wilderness where they wouldn't have it perhaps just....
WAYNE: ...in the office.
ANONA: Right, in the shopping center.
CYNTHIA: Is it not also one of the things that prophets do -- go out and meditate in a lonely place? John the Baptist -- a voice crying in the wilderness. We get the inclination to go out into the wilderness. You go on a retreat....
SUZANNE: Look what happens in temptation. We've all experienced it and will continue to experience it. But it seems to me that instead of looking upon it as temptation, it's a test. The test is not all negative. Anona and I spoke about this at one point, and she read me something to the effect that only through temptation can human nature attain perfection. And I think in terms of our children. Like putting them on and off the bus when they're small. You know, you take them by the hand and you lead them. Eventually there will come that time when they must get on that bus, and do it themselves. Maybe they'll fall out the door. Heaven forbid. The point is, all these tests that come along, distasteful as some of them are, I really think it is for a greater glory. And I think that may be this is what this testing is about -- to help us grow.
WAYNE: That's what I was talking about earlier. The fact that usually when God plans to use someone, they do have to go through some real testing.
ANONA: Here again, I think you have to look at all of Scripture, referring back to the wilderness and the children of Israel before they went into the promised land. The generation that knew what it was like back in Egypt -- although they were in bondage they were fed regularly; they had a place to stay and they were not wandering -- that generation had to die off in the wilderness before they entered the promised land. I think there is a reason for a wilderness. Something happens in preparation for what's to come, and it very often follows on something that has just taken place.
SUZANNE: I've just come out of a wilderness time. It ended up being a struggle of finding out who was God -- God or me! I think the world we live in often feels like a struggling wilderness. The choice is set before me moment by moment: will I choose for or against God?

SECOND WEEK

WAYNE: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and

ever. Amen.
ANONA: This is from John 3:1-17. "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, 'Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him.' Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?' Jesus answered, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born anew." The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.' Nicodemus said to him, 'How can this be?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.'

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

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CYNTHIA: I was struck, in the first sentence, that he came to Jesus by night. Does that mean he was hiding it?
ANONA: Barclay said there is that possibility, I think, but also in those days, for those who were studying the law, it was wise to do this at night when there are few interruptions.
ROLAND: But also, according to what I have read, in John's gospel night is a symbol -- darkness is a symbol of evil and ignorance. And this man is coming out of ignorance to be instructed.
KATHY: That takes it to the next level. One of the things about this John passage -- and I assume all the John passages -- is all these many levels. You turn just a fraction and you are at another level.
ROLAND: The Greek words have two meanings.
KATHY: Right.

WAYNE: Three meanings, even.
ROLAND: Here's a whole entry on "at night." It's about a fifteen-line paragraph. It says that John insistently recalls this detail because of its symbolic input. Darkness and night symbolize the realm of evil, untruth, and ignorance. On a purely natural level, this nighttime visit may have been a stealthy expedient "for fear of the Jews," or it may reflect the rabbinic custom of staying up at night to study the law.
SUZANNE: Somewhere I read that because Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin and -- I think it's Barclay, p. 123 -- the Sanhedrin had religious jurisdiction over all the Jews, and the duty to examine and deal with anyone suspected of being a false prophet. Now I think, from everything we have read, there was a yearning within Nicodemus that was drawing him to Jesus. But after reading that, I wonder if there wasn't also a sense of Nicodemus' desire to find out if Jesus was a true prophet.
CYNTHIA: What was the relationship between Nicodemus and Jesus, from all that you read? I read enough to see that at His death he was one who provided things that labeled him as a man of wealth. But I sensed all the way through -- that there was a very warm relationship. It wasn't adversary -- even, I felt, in this passage.
ANONA: Well, he calls Jesus "rabbi" right off, and he says, "We know you are a teacher." I was always under the impression that Nicodemus came to Jesus questioning. But, on the other hand, now I realize that people studied the law at night. And, if you read it carefully, you see that his first statement to Jesus <u>is</u> a statement. Did he come to affirm Jesus and say, "Rabbi, we recognize you as a teacher come from God?" And then suppose he was just basking in his affirmation. Then Jesus comes back with this statement that just possibly knocks him off his feet. And then he begins to question. So I would wonder, at what point did Nicodemus really question? Did he come there asking, or did he come there to affirm, and then realize that there was something more to ask?
ROLAND: Well, Nicodemus came to Jesus knowing He was a great teacher, approaching Him as he might a prophet. But what Jesus meant to convey was that He was a teacher from God in a way that Nicodemus does not expect: He has <u>actually come</u> from God. So that's what surprises Nicodemus -- not that He is a teacher, but that He comes directly from God.
KATHY: I find it interesting, too, that Nicodemus was referred to both as a ruler and a teacher. And he was coming to a rabbi, who was a teacher. You could almost see a learned person coming to speak with this rabbi just on a somewhat professional level -- as a colleague, and then discovering that this truly is a colleague but of a different nature. You

turn it slightly and it gets deeper and deeper and the examples take on double meanings and triple meanings and then plunge into all sorts of depths.
WAYNE: Something I read said the translation even loses the real impact of that statement, where Jesus turns and addresses him -- that He really was a famous teacher, not just a teacher.
CYNTHIA: I was struck also by Jesus beginning many of His replies with "in truth," "in very truth," not that I am that familiar with....
ANONA: Isn't that the "verily, verily?"
CYNTHIA: But it's very strong when it comes out like this: "in truth" -- as if Jesus was saying, "I've just got to tell you this is the truth."
ROLAND: That contributes to my feeling that this is a story about a man who is by no means a beginner or a stranger to the whole thrust of the Bible, that he is someone who is steeped in it and very knowledgeable. Jesus is not speaking as He might to the multitudes or someone who is not a Jew or to the unlearned....
KATHY: ...to those like the disciples who were, most of them, illiterate people. But Nicodemus was a learned man. I just thought about this -- there's a lot in this story for all of us who have some degree of education, like Nicodemus, who has studied the law, has studied Scripture, knows a lot of references, is considered successful, respected. And Jesus doesn't say to him "You're wrong"-- he just says, "You haven't gotten the whole point and there is something deeper that I ought to tell you about." It's getting at the point that all the teachings in the law cannot be the total answer. There is something beyond learning the entire Bible, following the law, doing all the prescribed things. It has to go into the soul of the person. That speaks to us today.
ROLAND: It all makes a lot of sense, and the whole story really begins to hold together, until you hit that twelfth verse: "If you disbelieve me when I talk to you about things on earth, how are you going to believe when I talk about things in Heaven?" As far as I know, He hasn't talked about a thing on earth. He's only talking about spirits and rebirth. What is he referring to?
ANONA: Well, I would guess that it just pertains to all of his teachings, which apparently Nicodemus was familiar with, if he was familiar with the miraculous signs. I think they're just probably not listed here prior to this account in John.
ROLAND: "If you disbelieve me when I talk to you about things on earth" -- this is in reference to some prior conversation?

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KATHY: What's this story about Moses and the serpent?
ROLAND: That symbolism of the serpent absolutely throws me!
CYNTHIA: The Good News version talks about a raised bronze serpent.
WAYNE: This was when the Israelites were wishing they were back in Egypt, right? And they were plagued by serpents.
ANONA: Fiery serpents.
WAYNE: This says that the Jews found it a very interesting story, because of the commandment not to make any graven image, but Moses was directed to make a bronze or a golden serpent and hold it high, and anyone who looked upon it would be healed.
ROLAND: What was this a symbol of in the Old Testament? Why a serpent?
WAYNE: That's what they were being plagued by: fiery serpents.
ROLAND: Well, here it says that Moses' serpent is an example of salvation coming through raising up on a cross.
ANONA: Well, this is a double meaning, where Jesus said the Son of Man must be lifted up -- both literally on the cross and lifted up into glory, which would be the resurrection and ascension.
ROLAND: Well, the thing that throws me the most is that the serpent in Genesis is a symbol of something totally different, and this confuses me....
WAYNE: Well, the point there was when the people looked upon the serpent, they were healed, and the point here is when Christ was lifted up and you looked upon Him, this is where you gain wholeness and salvation.
SUZANNE: And yet the worship in itself couldn't be the means, rather God was the one from whom the gift of healing was coming. It talks here about Jesus being the second Adam, winning where the first Adam lost, and bruising the serpent's head.
ROLAND: That strikes me as a type two question: what does this story mean to the people who heard it? You are connecting with a powerful symbol here that is not just the simple tempter, Satan symbol of Genesis. I don't feel that it comes across to me, because I don't know all those meanings and ramifications of that symbol.
SUZANNE: The analogy comes, I think, Roland, only at the end of each story. I think the thing you're having trouble with is that there is no correlation between the serpent and Jesus -- it's only in the act of Moses being obedient, and God giving him this and lifting it up. Am I wrong?
ROLAND: No, that's very helpful. This explanation absolutely clears up my whole problem. What meaning did the phrase "Son of Man" have to that audience? That's another question

I had.
CYNTHIA: I'm curious that it isn't Son of God, that it's "Son of Man."
ANONA: Unless this is the aspect of the humanity of Christ. I know there is a lot written on that, Roland, and I did not look it up for this; but I have read in the past and I think there is a gospel that refers to Jesus mostly as the Son of Man, and another refers to Him mostly as the Son of God.
ROLAND: That duality is familiar, but for Daniel to talk about the Son of Man -- there must be some significance that escapes us.
ANONA: Except that back then did the Jews, as early as Daniel's time, actually believe that the Messiah would be God? Or did they believe he would be a great prophet?
ROLAND: An earthly king. But the title "Son of Man" doesn't convey to me the term Messiah.
SUZANNE: Maybe we need to do further work on that.

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CYNTHIA: Well, we really haven't touched at all on the born again part. What would that have meant to them at that time?
KATHY: I would think that it would mean you have to be spiritually baptized, and born into a spiritual kingdom. It's sort of like a second birth, and one that has to be taken deliberately and knowledgeably by each individual.
ROLAND: Here it hangs a lot on the double meaning of another Greek work that means "from above" and "again." Nicodemus, thinking on a purely human level, takes the meaning "again" -- "unless a man be born again." Which leads to an impossibility. In an effort to explain, Jesus then speaks of being born of water and the Spirit, and Nicodemus should have understood this.
CYNTHIA: Well, what is the significance of water and the spirit today? This whole born again aspect is a type three area.
ROLAND: Nicodemus took it to mean an impossibility -- born again in the literal sense -- but what the words also meant was to be born from above. It's not talking about going back in your mother's womb and being born again in that sense. But that everyone who is to be saved is to be born not only in the flesh and into the flesh but of the Spirit and into the Spirit. And that's the sense in which it happens "again." It's really once from your mother's womb, and once from above. I find that makes it a whole lot easier to understand this born again business.
MICHAEL: I was lost in the mountains for five days and five nights. I thought about it as a born again experience. As a result of that experience I was baptized and prior to the

experience I was not a Christian. I was very much of a skeptical person about religion and about Christianity, so this is an experience that led me to being baptized. So, in the sense of being born again -- or what was that other expression, Roland, born "from above"?
ROLAND: The Greek word means both "again" and "from above."
MICHAEL: Being born "from above" I think does make more sense than "born again." I mean it just seems to be a new phase of your life, rather than returning to the womb, so to speak.
CYNTHIA: I guess the question I have that relates here is: how do you know when you're born again? Do you have to go out in the wilderness like Michael and discover it, or is it something that comes in a gradual way? Only Paul and a few others had a "road to Damascus" kind of thing, or, like Michael, a really major, catastrophic thing that happens to you. Most people that I have talked with and discussed this with say it just sort of creeps up and, all of a sudden, in the middle of the Giant checkout line, it comes to you that you really do believe.
ROLAND: I guess it's given to only a few of us to travel the Damascene road or to get lost for five days in the woods. That doesn't happen very often.
SUZANNE: It seems to me that if God loves each one of us uniquely, which it is said that He does, then each one of our walks is going to be a unique experience. Everyone in this room will have a different experience. Your situation will be totally different from mine.

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KATHY: Well, I must say I am surprised. Because I have read John before, and have sat around with people who have tried to think about what it all means. And I have never had what I consider such a solid discussion as we have had tonight.
ROLAND: I think this has been very good!
KATHY: I have never had exactly this sort of exchange before. Even in groups led by other people. It means a lot more for us just talking and having read references that are available and bringing our own experience to it.
SUZANNE: That's an interesting comment, in light of the initial desire of some that this would be a led group, to find it has such meaning.
ROLAND: Well, this will be interpreted as evidence that this experiment could succeed, that is, the same thing could be done by people who read this. We all have pretty busy lives, and it's not easy to delve into this stuff; you need at least a couple of hours of solitude to read all these commentaries and do a little thinking and then come back to it. I haven't had two hours in a long time!

KATHY: For me, it's making some time, and studying and being surprised by how much I can get out of it, even with the little time I have had to do this.
WAYNE: I've heard sermons on this passage, and I have learned things myself that I never heard in the sermons.
CYNTHIA: I would say that the difference tonight is that we all did get into the type three things with a lot of depth. As Verna said, that's the "fun" part of it. But you need to concentrate on the other parts, too.
KATHY: Well, that's the discipline for me -- to look up all those "type one" things, all the things that I never bothered to question but that I read as factual, and to get perspective, to find out what the words mean. That made it possible to relate with my own experience.

THIRD WEEK

WAYNE: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
KATHY: The fourth chapter of John, verses 5-42: "Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again from Galilee. He had to pass through Samaria. So he came to a city of Samaria, called Sychar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son, Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and so Jesus, wearied as he was with his journey, sat down beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

"There came a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus said to her, 'Give me a drink.' For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. The Samaritan woman said to him, 'How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?' For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered her, 'If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, "Give me a drink," you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, and his sons, and his cattle?' Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him

will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw.'

"Jesus said to her, 'Go, call your husband, and come here.' The woman answered him, 'I have no husband.' Jesus said to her, 'You are right in saying, "I have no husband;" for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly.' The woman said to him, 'Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.' Jesus said to her, 'Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.' The woman said to him, 'I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ); when he comes, he will show us all things.' Jesus said to her, 'I who speak to you am He.'

"Just then his disciples came. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but none said, 'What do you wish?' or 'Why are you talking with her?' So the woman left her water jar, and went away into the city, and said to the people, 'Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?' They went out of the city and were coming to him.

"Meanwhile, the disciples besought him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.' But he said to them, 'I have food to eat of which you do not know.' So the disciples said to one another, 'Has any one brought him food?' Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work. Do you not say, "There are yet four months, then comes the harvest?" I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already ripe for harvest. He who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, "One sows and another reaps." I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor; others have labored and you have entered into their labor.'

"Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony. 'He told me all that I ever did.' So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, 'It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard

for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.'"

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KATHY: There was apparently a virulent feeling between the Jews and the Samaritans and it lasted 400 years. It was no mellower at the time of this story than it was at the beginning, and part of the reason for this, from the commentaries I read, was the fact that when the Jews went off into exile they remained true to their faith, and the Samaritans gave in -- they sort of adapted themselves. It was a question of keeping to the true faith. The Samaritans had established this mountain as the holy place, and apparently they had written into their histories that all the important events of the Jewish faith took place on this mountain rather than elsewhere. The question that the woman asked, about the mountain versus Jerusalem, was again emphasizing the difference between those who upheld the true faith and those who did not.

ROLAND: In the parable of the good Samaritan, the phrase "good Samaritan" loses some of its force for us, but the Samaritans were assumed to be "bad," and for one to be called "good" was a striking thing to the people. There was no such thing as a "good" Samaritan.

KATHY: So the word "Samaritan" really has another meaning beyond the literal place name.

CYNTHIA: There were several places where they mentioned that Jews avoided Samaria. What is not clear to me is, what was a Jew? Was it all of Palestine -- the three portions of Palestine -- Galilee, Samaria, Judea? So were the other two the good Jews, and just the Samaritans in between that weren't Jews?

ROLAND: These objectionable people, these fallen-away people were between the northern and sourthern....?

CYNTHIA: Yes, they were in the middle. And one of the books said it was only 120 miles long.

ROLAND: What, Samaria?

CYNTHIA: No, the whole of Palestine.

ROLAND: Judea is in the south, Galilee is in the north. I guess that's the old Southern and Northern Kingdoms. And Samaria is in between.

KATHY: This time I had very few type one questions.

CYNTHIA: Well, if you read the Good News, I can see where you might not have. I know you read other versions, too. I had some type ones -- maybe they are also type two questions. In the New English version, it said, "He was sitting by the well just as he was," and I did not know what that meant. It said He was tired.

SUZANNE: In the Revised Standard, it says, "wearied as he was with his journey."

ROLAND: What was it that puzzles you?

CYNTHIA: It says, "just as he was." I didn't know what that meant.

ROLAND: It says here "tired after his journey."

SUZANNE: Well, I think it recalls the other passage we've had which dealt with Jesus' hunger in the wilderness. It once more emphasizes the focus of His humanity in terms of His fatigue.

ROLAND: The comment here is that no evangelist more clearly depicts Jesus' divinity. John also makes clear that He was flesh of our flesh. That might be the point.

KATHY: In a number of these stories, Jesus sends the disciples on to do things, while He waits a while. I have read this as a time when He can be alone, rather than having this horde of fold around asking questions and stumbling around and quarreling.

ROLAND: Complaining....

CYNTHIA: Then this woman comes along....

KATHY: There is no indication how long He was there. Even if the disciples left Him before they got to the well, and He said, "Well, why don't you go over and get some food, and we'll meet back at the well -- everybody knows Jacob's well."

CYNTHIA: Like "Meet you under the clock!"

ANONA: Speaking of Jacob's well, I wanted to know the history of it and the New American Bible says that Jacob's well is un-mentioned in the Old Testament, but it is the well of Schechem. St. Jerome said many copyists mistakenly put Sychar for Schechem.

ROLAND: Sychar creates a problem; although there are some traces of ancient reports of the existence of a Sychar, no traces of such a town have been found in the area of Samaria. If you translate it as Schechem, everything fits as Jacob's well is only 250 feet from Schechem. Probably Schechem was only a very small settlement.

CYNTHIA: Well, one of the commentaries mentioned that maybe she was getting her water there because she was somewhat of an outcast, and the other ladies from the village didn't want her getting her water out of the well, and so she had to come at a later time. Her lifestyle was different.

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SUZANNE: When the woman said, "Sir, I perceive you are a prophet - our fathers worshipped on the mountain," she changed the subject. Things were getting too close for her and too personal. Jesus was trying to teach through this dialogue, and she simply did not want to hear what He had to say.

KATHY: Actually I was sort of interested in this woman and impressed with her. The questions she asked were very personal and very practical. She didn't seem to be put off by this person she was talking to, first of all. She would have been if it were a recognized religious leader, because she was an outcast. She said, "How can you get this water? Look, it's a hundred feet deep. You have nothing to get it with." Very practical. And in the questions she's been recorded as asking, I thought she revealed herself as a fairly intelligent person, who caught on reasonably quickly.
SUZANNE: I didn't get that picture at all....
KATHY: Well, He told her everything about herself, and she instantly perceived that this was someone who had abilities beyond the ordinary person. She said, "Ah, you're a prophet!" And if you were at all interested in religious things, what questions do you ask prophets but this age-old question about where do you worship the true God. She said, "Ah, we've had this debate for 400 years. I have been taught that the mountain is the place to worship and you Jews say that the only real place is in Jerusalem. You, being a prophet, with the ability to figure out questions like this, what do you say about that?" And I thought that was a pretty perceptive kind of question.
CYNTHIA: I see your point and I also see Suzanne's. I think it is also an abrupt change of subject to go from talking about what is probably a sore point about husbands, to ask "Where do you worship?"
KATHY: Well, if you're a sinner and an outcast, the proper place to go to seek repentence or whatever is certainly foremost in your mind.
CYNTHIA: I have a question about that whole dialogue of "bring your husband" -- I don't have one" -- "you had five and now the one you're living with is not your husband." Is that the way the conversation went?
ANONA: Barclay or someone says this is like the minutes of the meeting. These are only the salient points of a very long conversation. It really <u>is</u> too choppy.
CYNTHIA: I think so....
ANONA: Or it seems too choppy to be all there was to it.
CYNTHIA: And I guess I wondered how does He know that she had five husbands. I'm not aware of His coming out with comments like this in other places. Is this a pattern?
ANONA: One of the commentaries pointed out that this is very much a pattern in John's writing -- the way a question is asked or a statement is made by a person and Jesus comes back with something that has a different meaning. And the person misunderstands and takes it literally when Jesus was getting to a deeper truth.

ROLAND: They make a big point in this commentary of the evangelist betraying a masterful sense of drama and various techniques of statesetting. There is misunderstanding (verse 11), irony (verse 12), the quick changing of an embarrassing subject (verse 19), the front and back stage (verse 29), and the Greek chorus -- the villagers (verses 39-42). All these dramatic touches have been skillfully applied to make this one of the more vivid scenes in the Gospel. I went back and looked at each of those verses.
KATHY: Yes, I'm terrifically impressed with the writer of John. These little stories are very neatly and skillfully done.
ANONA: I really think if we could see them as drama and if there were pauses, inflections, and all that, it would be different. We're so used to just reading it straight through and there is no time for the long silences there might have been.

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CYNTHIA: I just wanted to ask before we get to....
WAYNE: Yes, we have to leave time for the number threes.
CYNTHIA: When she says "I know the Messiah is coming. When he comes he will tell us everything." Jesus said, I am he, I who am speaking to you." Now has He said this before? Is this one of the first times He's said that?
ANONA: That He is the Messiah? This is the first time He has publicly declared Himself to be the Messiah.
KATHY: Well, is John that chronological?
ROLAND: Yes....
KATHY: I thought John was the one who was <u>not</u> chronological -- that he was all over the place.
ANONA: I don't know where I read it, but this is supposedly the first time He publicly claims who He is.
WAYNE: I seem to remember reading this, too -- "public" meaning it's the first time that He makes such a statement to those outside of the disciple group.
ANONA: Groups who like to pick up the case for women in serving in the church in various capacities like to point out that it was to a woman that Jesus is first recorded to have revealed Himself as the Messiah.
KATHY: That's very interesting. It surprised me about the disciples. They come back, and they see their teacher doing two things that you would not expect Him to do at all. One: talking to a woman, and two: really talking to a Samaritan and drinking water with a Samaritan. And they did not comment on any of those things.
ANONA: Well, I think all through His ministry He did unusual things -- He touched lepers ....
KATHY: Yes, but the fact that they didn't comment was what

I found interesting.
ROLAND: It's not only the problem of what Jesus was actually doing and what these disciples failed to ask, but on top of all that, there is the question of what is John telling us and failing to tell us in addition to all those uncertainties.
CYNTHIA: Yes, that's a part of the story that obviously intrigues John.
KATHY: Yes, and I was also interested to read that rabbis, the really orthodox ones, would close their eyes and walk into a wall rather than see a woman!
CYNTHIA: Bruised and....
KATHY: Bruised and bleeding Pharisees! Because they would close their eyes if a woman appeared, and go clunk into a wall! (Laughter)

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ANONA: Well, did any of you have any light shed on Jesus' reply to His disciples when they urged Him to eat something, and He said, "I have food to eat you know nothing about?" And they wondered if someone had brought Him food, and then He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me." Even in that small incident, could obeying the will of God have nourished Him to the point that at that particular time He didn't need food even when they brought it. Have you ever had that experience where you can be just dead tired and starving, and yet something will happen that's very exciting and invigorating and all of a sudden, you're renewed. You don't want to eat and you're ready to go on -- you're like a different person. And I'm wondering if this is what happened to Him.

Having been "raised in the church" all my life, I heard people say that Jesus is the Son of God and this type of thing, and I believed them. But then, once I experienced the power of Jesus Christ in my own life, I could say I not only believe but I know.
KATHY: Maybe that's the definition of the word "know" -- you really know versus you've heard.

FOURTH WEEK

WAYNE: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.
ANONA: Who has not read the scripture out loud?
ROLAND: I'll read it. That's John 9:1-41. "As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him. We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.' As he said this, he spat on the ground and made clay of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the clay, saying to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, 'Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?' Some said, 'It is he'; others said, 'No, but he is like him.' He said, 'I am the man.' They said to him, 'Then how were your eyes opened?' He answered, 'The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, "Go to Siloam and wash"; so I went and washed and received my sight.' They said to him, 'Where is he?' He said, 'I do not know.'

"They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, 'He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.' Some of the Pharisees said, 'This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath.' But others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' There was a division among them. So they again said to the blind man, 'What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?' He said, 'He is a prophet.'

"The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight, and asked them, 'Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?' His parents answered, 'We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.' His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that if any one should confess him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, 'He is of age, ask him.'

"So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, 'Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner.' He answered, 'Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.' They said to him, 'What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?' He answered them, 'I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear

it again? Do you too want to become his disciples?' And they reviled him, saying, 'You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.' The man answered, 'Why, this is a marvel! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.' They answered him, 'You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?' And they cast him out.

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, 'Do you believe in the Son of man?' He answered, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and it is he who speaks to you.' He said, 'Lord I believe'; and he worshiped him. Jesus said, 'For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, 'Are we also blind?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, "We see," your guilt remains."

WAYNE: I was the one who got the message from Suzanne who will not be able to be here, and she did say the main comment she wanted to make in response to this particular reading was that this has helped her more than anything she has come across in a good while, with regard to illness and where it comes from and why, and some problems she has been having in thinking that through.

CYNTHIA: The beginning of this, "Who has sinned, this man or his parents..."?

WAYNE: Right.

CYNTHIA: And she found comfort in that.

WAYNE: Yes.

MICHAEL: She was distressed over Andy's death.

WAYNE: Yes, that's right.

MICHAEL: So the implications of this passage helped her a bit.

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CYNTHIA: I had a question about what's the meaning of night and day. If we wanted to take that literally or as merely symbolic.

ANONA: Well, I thought it was interesting that Jesus said, "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work." And then the sentence following was, "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." It looked to me as if He was making a comparison there. That day and the time to work was there as long as He was present, and they had a lot to do. But then when He was going out of the world, what then? I found it interesting that He said, "We must work the works of him who sent me" -- not "I must do it" but "We." And then I think it was in the Interpreter's Bible where it referred to Matthew 5:14 where Jesus said, "You are the light of the world." So He has said that both His disciples, His believers, and He are the light of the world, and therefore partners in doing the work of the Father.

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CYNTHIA: Well, another one I was puzzled by, and I think I can figure out an answer, was that it said the blind man's parents were afraid of the Jews. It sounded as though they were not Jewish.

ANONA: Then why would they be afraid of being sent away from the synagogue?

ROLAND: This commentary relates that to the time in which this was written, towards the end of the first century, A.D., when a difference is beginning to emerge between Christian/Jewish communities and Jewish/Jewish communities. You could not remain a member of the synagogue and be a Christian. You could not be a good Jew and believe in Christ.

WAYNE: That He was the Messiah.

ROLAND: Yes, the positions were hardening, and the evangelist is writing in knowledge of that. The parents' fear of speaking out represents the dilemma of those Jews who find that they can no longer profess this faith that Jesus is the Messiah, and remain Jews.

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KATHY: I was fascinated by the whole story. This is a marvelously long, detailed story that is interesting enough and has enough exciting parts that you can just imagine it being told aloud. He said...and they said...and then he got thrown out and then called back, then he brought his parents in and they said, "Hey, don't bother me!" You don't have many stories that just go on in glorious detail like this. Often you have to dig the entire story out of two verses.

ANONA: And the man was just as outspoken and courageous as the parents were fearful and timid.

CYNTHIA: That was one of my questions: was he either ignorant or brave? Because speaking out like that was a very nervy thing to do. Yes, Michael. It's Michael's turn to talk.

MICHAEL: I see this is somewhat like the Apostles after Pentecost were imbued with the Holy Spirit. In a sense this man

experienced some of that himself. So he was willing to speak out boldly to the Pharisees, just like the Apostles later after Pentecost. They were all able to speak out in that way because they had seen the light.
WAYNE: In that respect, it bears out the position of the church in the healing ministry that many times there is more than physical healing in that a person's whole life has changed spiritually. Sometimes healings do not take place physically, but healing in the other dimension, in the life of the spirit, does.
KATHY: I particularly liked the part at the very end about the Pharisees saying "Does that mean we are blind?" He says, "If you were, it wouldn't be so bad." And I like that little twist at the end because it sort of ties up the story very neatly.
ROLAND: I have a sort of dramatic problem with that because just before that there is a strong implication that the Pharisees are nowhere around. When the man gets thrown out by the Pharisees, and Jesus hears about this expulsion, He finds him and says, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" So the implication is that He is talking to this guy in his rejected state, and all of a sudden there are a bunch of Pharisees hanging around again. Where did they come from? It doesn't quite fit in with the thrust of the preceding narrative.
KATHY: Well, that's the human drama of it, you know. The Pharisees couldn't let this stop. They asked him back more than once, and I can imagine them trailing him about after they threw him out of the synagogue.
ANONA: To see what he's going to do.
KATHY: To see what is going to happen. Is this going to be a permanent cure? Is this fellow going to appear on the scene again? Maybe we'll catch him in the act this time! This is really interesting. It develops a personality for everyone involved. The Pharisees are not acting as a solid bloc -- they have arguments. Some say he is from God; others say he is not. Some uphold the law by saying that you can't work on the Sabbath, and by making clay he was working. So these are real personalities -- it is not a one-dimensional, straw man kind of setup. That makes this story more believable for me, and that's why the message becomes more real for me, because it is a very real, human type of story that involves some pretty strong people. That beggar must have been an awfully interesting character.
CYNTHIA: Well, does this story appear in other gospels?
ANONA: I liked the part in verse 39 where Jesus says, "For judgment I have come into this world so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind." Up until now I had always thought of judgment as a very negative thing. Judgment, then condemnation. But there is a positive aspect to it, too. People can be judged not guilty or righteous or justified as well as being judged guilty and then condemned. So in a sense, judgment is sort of a neutral thing -- it can go either way, depending upon one's relationship to Jesus Christ. You remember, we talked a couple of weeks ago about people being judged in the light of who they say Christ is. But this gave me a very good feeling, the idea that judgment can mean that we who are blind can see.

ROLAND: It's the other part that throws me....
ANONA: What?
ROLAND: Those who cannot see will be made to see. The implication of that is that to see is a very good thing. So the rest of it gives me a problem. If they say that the people who already see shall be made blind, what's good about that?
ANONA: But the point about that is that they don't really see -- without Christ, there is no light. Therefore, they can't. They think they see.
WAYNE: They claim they can see -- they think they know it all, but by claiming to know it all they really are blind.
ROLAND: Well, that's the implication of this last verse; that's true. But I think that when Anona was talking about -- the passage just before that, "I came into this world for judgment, that those who do not see may be able to see, and those who do see may become blind." Now to extract your meaning from it, you have to assign a different meaning to the two phrases, the two words "to see."
KATHY: I think we think we do see, but in reality are blind to the more important things.
ANONA: Well, I think He said enough for the Pharisees to say to Him, then, "What, are we blind, too?" He was, in a sense, forcing their hand. They said it. Are we blind, too? And then He confirmed it! Once again, it was they who passed judgment on themselves.
WAYNE: He's not the one who is telling them. They are telling on themselves.
KATHY: In fact, the principle that you do it to yourself is there in the blind man taking the action and going to the pool.
ANONA: Yes, he could have said, "No, I'm not going to the pool and wash."
KATHY: You've got to be kidding -- with mud in his eyes?
ANONA: And that's why I think something more was required of him. Even at the risk of looking foolish, he had to obey and go do what Jesus said -- no matter how ridiculous it seemed.
ROLAND: If you have mud rubbed in your eyes, you might feel like washing them, too, though.
CYNTHIA: I really can't quite handle miracles. I don't know

quite what to do with them. But, it seems in most cases there has to be a willingness or an act of faith on the part of the person who is receiving this -- an openness to receive it.

ANONA: Well, I have heard of a case of a man who was so adamant against being healed, at least through the means of prayer or the healing rites of the church, that a group had to meet secretly, unknown to him, to pray for his healing. And the man was healed. So there has to be faith on the part of somebody....Also it was pointed out somewhere that this was John's style in reflecting on the life of Jesus all the way through. Not just to report the miracle, but to tell why He did it -- that through Jesus all men might see. We're all blind, but since He is the light, it's through Him that we can see.

CYNTHIA: It says in the commentary that John portrays miracles as the sign of God's glory and power.

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CYNTHIA: I don't know who's the offical timekeeper today, but I wonder if there are any category two questions that we haven't dealt with?

KATHY: One number two-type thought: I can see this event could have been the sensation of the year when it happened. Everybody knew the man was blind from birth, everybody knew the Pharisees, and a lot of people certainly knew this new person on the scene named Jesus, and what He did was observed and reported. So, talking about what the impact was on the people who heard it in light of their remembering it, I can see that it was probably the event of a lifetime for the people involved.

ANONA: Well, following up on that, one of the commentaries pointed out the progression that took place in the man's own life, as far as how he viewed Jesus. He first referred to Him as a man, then a prophet, then "Sir," then Lord -- and worshipped Him.

FIFTH WEEK

WAYNE: Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

SUZANNE: I don't know how you all feel about the logistics of the sessions. Do you feel we jump around? Is there a better way to share the study?

KATHY: I do feel we have jumped around. Maybe it would be useful to try to go through it more systematically, keeping to the number one questions, and then going into the type two questions also before we get into the type three -- which is really quite wide-ranging.

SUZANNE: Where does that leave us?

CYNTHIA: Starting out with the number ones, instead of popping around....

ROLAND: Taking the verses in order?

CYNTHIA: We could do it that way.

WAYNE: That was what I wanted to ask you, too.

SUZANNE: I didn't know if that was helpful. I was just trying to think of ways that we could go about it so that we would come away with a full sense, not only of the larger meaning -- but also there is a lot in here that we sometimes don't even get to cover.

CYNTHIA: That's right. Certainly the one night we had Verna here, the questions were just all over the place, and yet she didn't try to say, "Okay, now in verse one...." which I think was in a sense trying to encourage us just to let all kinds of thoughts....

ROLAND: Maybe we can ask for "one" questions for a few moments, anyway, and then maybe take the verses and ask all the "one" questions there are going to be. I find it sort of confining and restrictive and hard to say we'll take all the one type questions about that and all the two type questions about that and all the three type questions about that. It's too atomistic. One of the things that has come through to me in this whole experience is my very great difficulty in grasping these things even in the fairly long stretches of scripture we take at one time, because everything I try to understand or read about in commentaries goes off in other directions and requires a sort of comprehensive acquaintance with the whole that I don't have. I have trouble with taking one verse and making sure you milk that, and then going on to the next verse. The whole is not the sum of those little parts. That approach doesn't yield adequate understanding to me.

KATHY: ...Our movement from type one to two to type three questions has always been kind of blurred, and maybe we need to take the time to be careful about asking "What was this saying to the people who heard it?" Would that answer it?

CYNTHIA: It may be that it never would. Roland may be bothered by atoms and you by....

SUZANNE: I think that either one loses in the extreme. It's

arriving at a combination of the two that gives the challenge.
ROLAND: Who has not read the scripture aloud?
CYNTHIA: I have not.
ROLAND: You have not read? Everybody else has? Why don't you....
CYNTHIA: John 11:1-44. "Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent to him, saying, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it he said, 'This illness is not unto death; it is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by means of it.'

"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that he was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go into Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were but now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any one walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if any one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him.' Thus he spoke, and then he said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awake him out of sleep.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.' Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead; and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

"Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary sat in the house. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. And even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, he who is coming into the world.'

"When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying quietly, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. Then Mary, when she came where Jesus was and saw him, fell at his feet, saying to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; and he said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus wept. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

"Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. I knew that thou hearest me always, but I have said this on account of the people standing by, that they may believe that thou didst send me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"
SUZANNE: You read that beautifully. It seems to mean so much.
KATHY: I found that the words, for the most part, were easy to understand. Having read the various commentaries, I could make out why people remembered the story, but I had terrific difficulty in bringing it to the number 3 phase. I had a few number one questions and a bunch of type twos, and a whole bunch of type threes that I had little hope of ever answering. Too many problems!
ANONA: I found that as I read the commentaries I got more answers than I had questions. They enlightened things that had not even occurred to me to ask, which made me realize that there was so much more to this than a simple story of a great happening.
KATHY: Well, how about the number one type questions. I had simple questions, when I first read it, such as who were Mary and Martha? What does Bethany mean? He waited two days, and then after He arrived Lazarus had been dead for four days.

What did those numbers mean? Where does this come in the ministry? And is this the same Thomas who's the doubter? Those kinds of things -- but mostly the commentaries answered them.
ROLAND: Most of the questions you just asked were dealt with in the commentaries that I read. But one question -- I just checked again and I don't see anything in reference to it -- is verse 9, after the disciples say, "What are you going back to Judea for? They tried to stone you there. Why are you going there again?" Before He gets to what I regard as an understandable answer to that, He has this business about "twelve hours of daylight" and walking around in the daytime and the nighttime. That totally throws me. I don't have any idea of what He's saying there. Anybody....?
KATHY: I think that's mostly John's big emphasis of Jesus being the light -- the light of the world. He's bringing "light into the world" together with "life" in this story...
ROLAND: Yeah, I get that, but what does it have to do with the question that was asked Him?
ANONA: One commentary I read seemed to indicate that when God has assigned a task to somebody and that person is operating within God's will, he will be able to accomplish it. Until Jesus' ministry was at a point where the time had come for His crucifixion to take place, it couldn't happen. It simply could not be taken over by man if it was not yet God's time. And therefore He was to continue doing God's will until He had completed what He was sent to do.
ROLAND: I am trying to ask a "one" question; I'm not sure what it is or if I am succeeding. But a type one question would be "What did this mean to the people who heard it or how did they understand it?" What's a "one" question?
KATHY: What do the literal words mean.
ROLAND: O.K., you're right. I don't see any literal meaning problem with that. I am having the problem of imagining myself standing there and I say, "Hey, why do you want to go back there? They're going to kill you." And He says this thing, and that would stop me absolutely cold -- unless there is something in being an ancient Jew that I would know and that would enable me to interpret this. Whereas if He had directly said, in response to that question, "Our friend, Lazarus, is fallen asleep and I shall come to wake him." I would find that a lot clearer.
KATHY: Do you think this might be an editorializing by John? He tells what Jesus said, and then says later He "told them plainly," implying that it was puzzling to them, too. This remark wasn't terrifically clear even to the hearers, so He had to go on and explain it.
ROLAND: That kind of thing happens in John, I think.
SUZANNE: If He were to turn to His disciples and say, "Our friend is ill and we are going back," that is a perfectly understandable, human response -- they would be going to meet a need. But, from reading many of these passages, it seemed to me that one of Jesus' first priorities was to raise the thought of the people to whom He was speaking to a higher level. It wasn't that tending to Lazarus' needs wasn't important, but that the guiding purpose behind that returning and tending was because it was the will of God who had sent Him -- not just because He wanted to go. And that's why -- I don't know how you describe this kind of thing -- that's why He says "Are there not twelve hours in...." The point is it's a bigger lesson than just this event.
CYNTHIA: But what that principle is that He's teaching I'm not that certain.
ROLAND: To be perfectly crude about it, He could have made Himself much plainer by saying something other than what it says here.
CYNTHIA: Maybe it was plainer to them...
ROLAND: Well, I ask a simple question, and He starts talking to me about twelve hours of daylight. You know, that....
SUZANNE: It's almost as if He is saying it as a teaching for the future that they will look back on and say, "So <u>that's</u> what He meant."
ANONA: Well, this is John's style: "Jesus said this, but <u>this</u> is what He meant." It <u>is</u> looking back. I think this is <u>what</u> John does in his Gospel. But Cynthia, you referred to, I think, John 9:4 which was in the story we had last time about Jesus healing the blind man. It says: "As long as it is day we must do the work of Him who sent me."
SUZANNE: Yes....
ANONA: "Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world I am the light of the world."

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CYNTHIA: And then, "Let's go so we can die with him too." I don't understand what that was all about. What did Thomas mean by dying with him?
ANONA: Well, don't you think he probably meant that they had tried to stone Jesus before? Thomas was apparently being a little bit heroic.
CYNTHIA: I guess I interpreted that to meaning dying with Lazarus.
WAYNE: No, Jesus.
KATHY: It bothers me where it says He is going to do this because it's to fulfill what the Lord wants. He's going to be an instrument of God as if all this grief and pain was designed for a purpose. I would feel a whole lot more comfortable if I could be sure that it meant that this circumstance

was going to be taken and used for a particular purpose. Not that this circumstance was imposed to create the situation in the first place.
CYNTHIA: This is what we were dealing with last time. Was that man blind only because he could be used to show Jesus' special powers? We discussed that quite a bit.
KATHY: It doesn't say how Lazarus died, or why or anything, but if Lazarus was put through the grief and the pain and all that for the express purpose of having him dead at the time that Jesus needed to have somebody to raise up, that would bother me more than if Jesus, seeing the circumstances of Lazarus....
SUZANNE:....did something about it.
KATHY: That he took the situation as it was, that Lazarus was sick, that he was going to die or whatever, or that he knew that this was coming or something...
SUZANNE: You're saying he set it up?
KATHY: Well, it bothers me to think that Lazarus was set up! ...It goes back to the disciples' question about the blind man: "Whose sin was it that this man was born blind?" If it was nobody's sin, then was he set up?
SUZANNE: Isn't it saying instead that there are natural circumstances, and that if that man hadn't been blind, it might have been somebody else that had had something else happen to them. It seems the message is not the setting up, so much as that Jesus would be able to redeem a given situation. Here is the situation. Natural circumstances have caused it. Jesus enters this person's life and this is what happens. I think this is what is being said. It's not....
MICHAEL: It's not that these people are put there by design; it's that people just happen to be there.

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KATHY: The way John has written this story, it is a tremendously multi-leveled tale with lots of messages. But John is the only one who wrote about this event.
CYNTHIA: He did? I didn't know.
WAYNE: Yes, he was the only one.
KATHY: I wondered why Luke and Matthew and Mark didn't remember this if it was such a big event. According to John, it's the big moment preceding the crucifixion....
ANONA: You're asking what it meant to the people in those days. When Martha said, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world," what difference did it make to their lives at that particular time, that that's who Jesus was? Did the people understand that it was something they could experience -- a benefit they could experience in this life and not have to wait until

the next life, the fact that He was the Christ?
SUZANNE: Well, that's brought up in connection with the resurrection; the statement is made that He will be resurrected in this life and Jesus responds: "I am the resurrection and the life."
ANONA: Did she realize yet that that was a benefit to her in this life?
CYNTHIA: That's a good question.
KATHY: It's awfully challenging constantly trying to unravel these problems. As Roland says, it isn't particularly clear, and you keep tugging at it trying to get an answer. What did He mean when He said this?
ANONA: How could they understand it in any more complete way than to experience it right then?
ROLAND: What we're talking about here demonstrates how hard it is to understand parts of it without a better acquaintance with the whole purpose of John's gospel. The whole thrust of this gospel is to convey his notions of the major purpose of Jesus. And that whole big picture I don't have....
SUZANNE: When Jesus spoke about death and life and resurrection, did the people not fully understand what He was talking about until He Himself was resurrected?
KATHY: My feeling is yes, that His own death and resurrection gave an added dimension to all these things.

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KATHY: Well, what do you suppose the people who were there thought when Jesus shouted, "Lazarus, come out," and he did?
WAYNE: Many of the people of that time believed far more in the supernatural than we do today.
ROLAND: Well, okay, this guy comes out of the tomb. John doesn't help you. There are just two sentences -- "Unbind him and let him go." No comment. Then the scene shifts to Jerusalem and the Sanhedrin and all that. That's very curious to me. Is he just going to let it speak for itself? The presumption is that the people saw and believed...?
ANONA: Well, on the other hand, some of them didn't. We stopped at verse 44, but verse 45 says, "Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him; but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done." And this really bears out what Jesus said about the other Lazarus who had died and was in the bosom of Abraham and the rich man said, "Let me go back and tell my brothers," and Jesus said, "If they didn't believe Moses, even if somebody did come back from the dead, they wouldn't believe." And here is a perfect example.

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ROLAND: The whole thrust of the commentary is that it seems to say John is not giving a little collection of reminiscences. He is not concerned with anecdotal descriptions of various events in the life of somebody he knew and thought very much of. It's much more connected and integrated and dramatic and literary than that. He's telling us a whole big, complicated story, and any one part of it can't be seen in isolation from the whole thrust of whatever it is he is getting to. I just have to study the whole darn thing -- not just this part and this part and verse 1 through 17, etc. I don't see how you can avoid the problem of considering the Gospel of John in its entirety. I guess this constitutes a problem with how we are doing this. We have a sequence of scriptural passages. No one of them is enough to convey the whole. You have much more familiarity with all of this than I do, Nona. You can connect things that I can't connect.
ANONA: Well, not really because this is where the Spirit acts, I think, regardless of what reading or study one has done in the past. I think when people come together or even alone and are seriously studying scripture, it's the one who may be newest at it through whom the Spirit may really speak and give a fresh approach.
ROLAND: You're so encouraging! (Laughter)
ANONA: No, I think that's true. But in line with what you're saying I wish we had brought the Interpreter's Bible. The very lessons we have studied -- the woman at the well, Nicodemus, the blind man, and now this -- those are the four passages the Interpreter's Bible said were all zeroing in on the same message. And it says that this particular passage is so profound that we really can do nothing but keep silent about it. "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." There is nothing more to be said. It's all right here and we can't take it apart and we can't interpret it.
KATHY: We had best move to type three.
CYNTHIA: We should be in the type threes now.
ROLAND: Well, thank you for your encouragement, and I think I know what you mean, but I find that this doesn't speak for itself. The significance of this story to me is not contained solely therein. You need to know a whole lot of other things to assess or to feel the profundity of it. I can't think of a way of making this clear, but I think you would not be willing to accept an equally profound story in a different context solely on that evidence.
ANONA: You mean in or out of scripture?
ROLAND: Say something entirely out of scripture.
ANONA: That's true, I wouldn't.

ROLAND: You know, $E = MC^2$! You would have to know a whole lot of things before you know how profound that is. Or the second law of thermodynamics: you read it and it takes twenty words. But it's one of the most profound statements of intellectual attainment in the whole world. But you can't grasp it just by looking at it! You have got to connect with a million other things, and you have to be able to see down deep into it. I think the same is true of scripture. I'm not familiar with it as you are. I'm really a beginner in all this. I have sort of been around church all my life, and never really paid any attention to it. I have to do a lot of work to get where you are on this, and I may have a different way of doing it than you. I mean, there is more than one way to do it. Boy, I feel just at a loss in understanding nine-tenths of this. Willing as I am to accept the notion that there is a transcendent deity, and the divinity of Christ and all that, I find a lot of this stuff just terribly hard to understand.
KATHY: Do you suppose that's why we keep coming back and trying a Bible study here and something else there? I certainly find that I need to keep looking at something and go away and then come back at it from another direction to put more perspective on what I'm getting. But it's got to be worked at and it's got to be taken in digestible pieces. Otherwise, you don't absorb anything.
SUZANNE: Also, in reading scripture, in two months you'll go back to something that made absolutely no sense to you at one point -- or you'll come upon it in two years -- and for some reason the Holy Spirit will enlighten you about that scripture. And you thought, at that time, you would never understand it!
ROLAND: I think that's right. My problem is the newness of it all. If I had read the overview at the beginning of the Anchor Bible Commentary, that gives you the whole structure and framework and the inter-relatedness of the parts and all that, before going into the scripture, that would probably have helped.
ANONA: But, Roland -- I do think, too, that the beauty of the Bible is that on the one hand this might stand alone for some people, but on the other hand if you searched the entire Bible you wouldn't find anything that contradicted this in principle or in underlying truth. It would support it. And I think if we all had ten lifetimes, we could never be able to digest it all and understand it all -- it never runs out no matter how much we study and feel we have progressed. I think that's part of what makes scripture living. There's always that much more!
WAYNE: I think that's what Verna was saying -- that she would now say that she would not read the Bible every day, but

that she would study the Bible every day.
ROLAND: I think that's right. It's inexhaustible.

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ROLAND: I feel very Greek! (Laughter)
ANONA: Say something in Greek
CYNTHIA: Alpha, Omega!
KATHY: You know, we really can read it as Hewbrews.
ROLAND: How's that?
KATHY: Verna made the distinction between reading the Bible as Greeks -- you look for proofs -- and reading it as Hebrews -- then you're asking what this says to me about the action of God -- And there's another thing about this business of Jesus weeping. I read it in one of the commentaries -- I forget which -- that John was writing for the Greeks and Greek gods had no emotions. So any emotional display on the part of someone who is being put forward as God Himself was something absolutely new and revolutionary to Greeks hearing it.

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CYNTHIA: I know in my heart I'm not supposed to find it hard that Jesus is so sure of what is going to happen when the stone is rolled back, but I do find it hard. You pray and you think that maybe you are getting some direction somewhere, but I am never this sure.
KATHY: For me, the direct line is not quite clear; there's a lot of static on the line. And sometimes I think I am getting somebody else's conversation!
CYNTHIA: I guess that what would be wonderful would be to get to the point where you have so much faith that you have that confidence.
ANONA: Wouldn't all this increase for us the more we are in line with God's will? The little that is in the Bible about Jesus' lifestyle is enough to make me know I'm not in line with that, and therefore, I can't expect at this time such results.... May I say one more thing? This is definitely a type three, but it occurred to me just in the reading for this study. The very last verse where it says that Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go." At first reading, that seems almost an anti-climax. Once Lazarus comes out alive, having been dead for four days, in a sense what difference does it make what Jesus says? It's all very clear what's to be done. But when that miracle doesn't happen -- you know, when you hope for it and expect it and it doesn't happen, then those words still have meaning for me. For many of us who have prayed for a miracle [illegible] that and it doesn't take place, then those words say that

we are to take the grave clothes off ourselves -- the "clothes" being the attidtude we have tying us to death and to the person who didn't live, and we are to let that person go. He has gone in death, and we are to relinquish that person to Christ. When the miracle of life on this earth doesn't come, we are not to tie ourselves to the dead or to death but to release that person to Jesus, and in our own minds let him go on to Him. And those words just spoke very powerfully to me for the first time. They never had before. But that's very special. (Silence)
SUZANNE: When Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life, and he who believes in me though he die yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die" -- there is a bigger vision here that I pray someday I will be able to get hold of. There is something that really spoke to me here -- death did not break the living union between the soul of Lazarus and his redeemer. I think that was what Christ was saying when Mary said, "I believe he will be resurrected on the last day." And Christ responded, "I am the resurrection and the life." It's not off in some distant time. It's right here and it's now.
CYNTHIA: That last phrase in there, that I had never really listened to before....
ROLAND: Verse 25: "And everyone who is alive and believes in me shall never die at all."
SUZANNE: There is something....as you love another human being and as you love Christ, when someone dies you are personally saddened at the separation. But I wonder if the measure of real love is not in recognizing the union of that individual with Christ. It's not separated. This has really been a powerful lesson for me. I think you're right, that "whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."
CYNTHIA: I think I'll be working on that little phrase for a long time.

AFTERWORD

The title of this booklet comes from the Letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 12. The whole section from verse 4 to verse 16 is worth noting.

"There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore it is said,

'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives,
and he gave gifts to men.'

(In saying, 'He ascended,' what does it mean but that He had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is He who also ascended far above all the heavens, and He might fill all things.) And His gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love."

This passage speaks to the worth and dignity and high possibilities of every member of the church. It speaks to our need to prepare ourselves and to our ability to do it. All of us can grow and mature, and the body is only what it is supposed to be when each part is what it is supposed to be.

We live in a hierarchical system. There is always someone on top -- teachers over students, leaders over followers, doctors over patients, clergy over laity. There is little in our environment that helps us claim our own authority.

I think the Biblical images of the people of God and the church offer another possibility. Instead of hierarchy, community; instead of external "This is it," internal appropriation of experience. Teachers and students learn from each other, leaders and followers set goals and strategies together, doctors and patients collaborate in the healing process, clergy and laity are members one of another.

One without the other is not complete.

The Bible comes out of faith communities. It is best understood in faith communities.

Ancient Israel believed that God was acting in the history of their lives and that all kinds of people could understand that divine action. These people had little in common except their response to the work of God as they understood it. The New Israel is the spiritual descendent, called to be saints, called to speak by faith an understanding of the mighty act of God in Christ.

The purpose of Bible study is to wrestle with those understandings so that our past will illuminate our present. The connection between these two is aptly caught up for me by Henri Nouwen in a paragraph from Reaching Out, the section on "ins" and "outs" of relationships:

"Only when we have come in touch with our own life experiences and have learned to listen to our inner cravings for liberation and new life can we realize that Jesus did not just speak, but that he reached out to us in our most personal needs. The Gospel doesn't just contain ideas worth remembering. It is a message responding to our individual human condition. The Church is not an institution forcing us to follow its rules. It is a community of people inviting us to still our hunger and thirst at its tables. Doctrines are not alien formulations which we must adhere to but the documentation of the most profound human experiences which, transcending time and place, are handed over from generation to generation as a light in our darkness." (P. 62. Doubleday, 1966)

It is very natural that we will think someone else can do Bible study better, someone else knows more about this than we do. We have grown up in a world that gives us few other signals.

But something New has happened in the world. We are New Creatures. We can affirm a new calling, a new community.

Our questions, our searchings, our responses are the beginning of all learning. No answers mean anything until we have asked the questions, and no answers mean anything until we have accepted them as our own.

We need constantly, however, to bring our individual questions and answers to interaction with the questions and answers of others. That is why Bible study should be done in groups, in which all of us are teachers and learners.

The St. Columba's group has pointed a way. They have indicated how the journey might begin. The maturing of the saints is the process of a lifetime.

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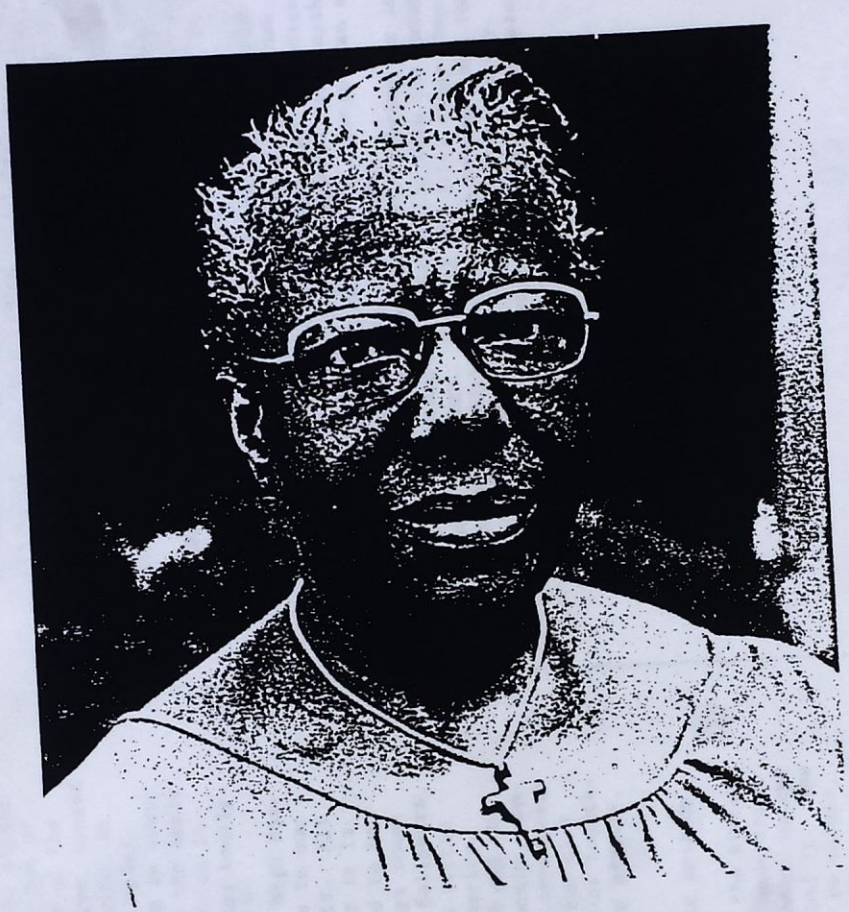

Verna Dozier has a passion for helping the laity own the ministry to which they were commissioned at their baptism. Since her retirement after 32 years as a teacher of English in the public schools of the District of Columbia, she has been teaching people how to study the Bible, consulting with churches, and working with lay groups to encourage them to claim their authority.

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